Katherine Toll | Work Samples Fall 2018

1. Stakeholder Salience Model **Artifact**

The following is a stakeholder analysis I created in September of 2018 for a Strategic Communication assignment. We were asked to create a Venn diagram using the stakeholder salience model, so I applied it to my current client thus creating an opportunity for applied learning. It demonstrates my ability to quickly integrate learnings from class work into my day-to-day environment. Working through the model helped me better understand the subtleties of each stakeholder group, which guided me to develop a revised communication plan for the various groups. I presented it the project's leadership that same week and gained approval for the plan. When diagraming the stakeholder salience mode, my biggest take-away was realizing stakeholder statuses change as timing and circumstances change, so revisiting the assessment throughout a project is important.

LO2: Demonstrate the ability to assess complex organizational environments and achieve communication goals.

LO4: Apply communication-centered scholarship in order to strengthen communication effectiveness.

D2: Utilize communication to embrace complexity and difference.

Key Words: Stakeholder salience, applied learning, communication plan, Edward Freeman

Stakeholder Salience Model

I found this exercise incredibly enlightening for a current client issue I'm working through. As mentioned my firm is in the midst of a large system implementation that is being phased-in over a course of several months. A functional stakeholder assessment was done early in the project, before I arrived, using the red, yellow, and green coding (high, medium, and low impact). It lacked detail for the peripheral functions and missed key information for functions directly impacted. Last week I spent too much time navigating issues with people indirectly impacted, which caught me off guard. The consequences of the flawed first assessment came back to haunt us, so returning to the drawing board (so to speak) was beneficial.

In diagramming the Stakeholder Salience Model I realized stakeholder status's change as timing and circumstances change, so revisiting the assessment throughout a project is important (p. 67). Our reading and video lecture presents Edward Freeman's definition: 'A stakeholder is any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of an organization's purpose and goals' (p. 64). As noted in our lecture, this definition spans an array of people, so it is easy to cluster them into a few generic groups (e.g., directly impacted versus indirectly impacted, functions versus roles/individuals, change resistant versus willing to change, etc.). It leaves you with a basic picture rather than a more nuanced breakdown of stakeholders.

Initially I felt the seven stakeholder groups and the more complicated Venn diagram was too much – a tad bit too academic for the real world, but "I got it" as I worked through the

exercise and became more familiar with the seven groups. Upon reflection, stakeholders that had been dormant (power, but no legitimacy or urgency) morphed into demanding (urgency, but no power, or legitimacy) stakeholders because the time for these stakeholders to voice their concerns passed a year ago (p. 68-69). In other words, a year ago it was a 'conceptual' conversation not taken seriously by them, so they invoked the adage of '*this too shall pass'*. Fast-forward a year – during this time our project team engaged intermittently with these groups plus these stakeholders were not included in the regular 'core team' communication updates, so they behaved defensively when we popped up last week with our system demonstrations and 'updates' to their day-to-day job responsibilities.

We have nine functions impacted and, when diagrammed, four of the seven stakeholder groups influenced a rework of our communication plan and engagement tactics. The four most influential stakeholder groups were (See Figure 1.1):

1. Dormant

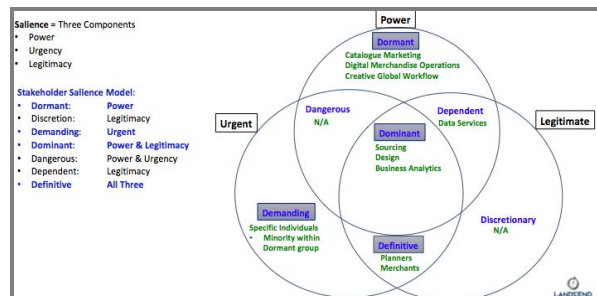2. Demanding

3. Dominant

4. Definitive

Figure 1.1   *Stakeholder Salience Model*

I realized I needed to rework our communication plan after I diagrammed the Stakeholder Salience Model. Our communication plan had to include the four stakeholder effects (awareness, understanding, involvement, and commitment) as well as a defined communication strategy (informational, persuasive, and dialogue) (p. 71). See Figure 1.2 for the revised communication plan.
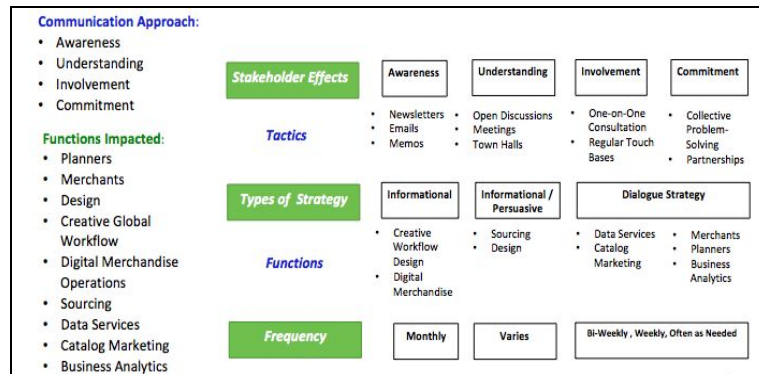

Figure 1.2 Stakeholder Communications: From Awareness to Commitment

The outcome of this exercise was presented today and well received by the project leadership. I look forward to more productive engagement with our entire stakeholder base and (selfishly) a bit more peace in my day-to-day work.

#end

2. Reaction Assignment:

Grounding and Awareness **Artifact**

The following is a reaction assignment I submitted in November of 2018 for Collaborative Technology. We were asked to submit our assignment based on several discussion prompts *and* also keep it within a specified word limit. The grounding and awareness readings, lectures, games, etc. where daunting (to say the least). That week's assignments totaled 32 components comprised of:

- Four readings
- Four YellowDig posts
- 17 videos (of varying length and quality)
- Four "games"
- Two reaction assignments posted via group discussion board

It pleased me to receive 10/10 points for both reaction assignments, but this particular artifact displays my ability to take complex concepts and apply them to a real-world situation. Understanding teams and how they interact with collaborative technologies via theories, models, etc. is not only interesting, but important. But, my key take-away centered on my ability to take the learnings, apply them to 'real life', and influence and improve *how* teams use and interact with the technology and with each other. This proved a pivotal moment for me in the program – while I'm mostly humbled by the academic prowess of the faculty, I cannot allow myself to discount the work I (or my classmates) do every day, in the 'trenches', to facilitate a better version of the current practice/procedure/point of view in our daily work.

LO3: Address complex challenges by collaboratively leading teams across disciplines, distances, and sectors.

LO4: Apply communication-centered scholarship in order to strengthen communication effectiveness.

D2: Utilize communication to embrace complexity and difference.

Key Words: Grounding, grounding costs, least collaborative effort, Clark and Brennan

Reaction Assignment: Grounding and Awareness

I selected SharePoint because it's considered a shared workspace, but I still struggle to think of it in those terms. For me it's a repository of work products and a difficult one to navigate. My client's project team uses it and my firm will be migrating to it shortly, so I need to make friends with it. For the sake of this assignment I've isolated a specific case on which to focus – the drafting, editing, and approval of training documents, which needed to be finalized in a narrow time window. Four of my colleagues and I were involved in the project and one was our supervisor who was the approver. None of us were in the same place – we were spread across the country in three different time zones and working on five or six separate documents, so that added more complexity. To be fair I suspect none of us understand SharePoint's full capability, so we may not use it in its most productive manner.

Because we all use SharePoint, I thought the grounding costs were minimal, but I was wrong. The notion of least collaborative effort flew out the window earlier in the week when one of my colleagues overwrote changes another one had made in a document. Least collaborative effort assumes flawless execution of the communication – meaning the information presented is crystal clear and it's accepted without confusion.

As Clark and Brennen state, "It does not allow for grounding and therefore cannot do justice to what is really happening in conversation" (p. 134). The three areas that impose on least collaborative effort are time-pressure, errors, and ignorance (p. 135-136). In our particular situation we had several of the eight grounding constraints at work against us. The three most influential were copresence, visibility, and contemporality, which drove up the grounding costs. Specifically, those cost were production, speaker-change, and repair.

I'll begin with production costs – any re-work ultimately needed to occur in the actual document, however we used text, phone, and email to communicate what changes were needed and where. All of those mediums take more time than face-to-face. Additionally, I could not look at my co-worker to see if she was busy. I texted or emailed her to ask, which takes me longer to

produce. When edits were complete the 'owner' needed to email or text the rest of us, so we could continue with our assigned task.

Our second cost was speaker-change. Obviously with five people involved we were handing off documents to one another. Brennen and Clark comment that changing speakers in

these types of media are akin to starting the communication from scratch (p. 145). For example – I would receive an edited document, but pivoted to work on other things. I needed to reorient myself every time, so I tried to get as much done with it as possible before "releasing" it. And finally, my personal favorite: repair costs. Repairs were needed frequently because several documents were in play. The approver sent me an email alerting me I could edit and finalize the document, but only after others had accessed it and 'repaired' it several times.

My key takeaway from this exercise is this: we (as a team and a firm) need to learn how to use SharePoint, so we maximize the tool and minimize our time using it. I recommend reading the user guide and identifying the top three to five 'ground-rules', so as a firm we agree these non-negotiables are always used with the tool, so it actually acts as a shared workspace.

#end

3. Reaction Assignment:

Task Analysis **Artifact**

I wrote this task analysis in the second week of Collaborative Technology. We were asked to analyze a task based on factors like, high/low level of uncertainly, level of interdependency, and loose versus tight task-coupling. It offered me an ability to reflect on an arduous endeavor that spanned several months. Up until that point, I'd categorized and 'filed' it under "that sucked" experience. I move so quickly in my work that often the team (or I) don't take the time to properly hindsight what worked and what didn't. So, this exercise helped me reflect and understand why it was difficult and how I would improve the process in the future.

LO2: Demonstrate the ability to assess complex organizational environments and achieve communication goals.

D2: Utilize communication to embrace complexity and difference.

D4: Be equipped to influence change.

Key Words: Task Analysis, interdependence, RACI, task coupling

Reaction Assignment:

Task Analysis

Debrief: Finance Task/Role RACI Development
Date: August 2017

       I analyzed a task performed within an SAP ERP implementation. The project team was comprised of approximately 90 people. We were each assigned to a specific sub-team and further assigned a particular role (e.g., Business Lead, Organizational Change Management Lead, Subject Matter Expert, etc.) based on our area of expertise. I was the Change Management Lead for the finance function and this particular task focused on developing a task/role RACI for the function. The project plan allotted six weeks for its completion, but it took 12-13 weeks, and some would argue it was still not complete.

       There was high level of uncertainty because my degree of understanding was LOW, as in the gutter LOW. At the time, finance was my weakest knowledge base. I knew the typical steps for creating a RACI, but this particular client did not agree with our methodology, so we adapted to their needs. What resulted for me was an unfamiliar process combined with a low level of understanding for this function. It was a highly interdependent undertaking because of the complexity of the task combined with the dynamics of the team. The team leader demanded a high level of involvement, so instead of breaking down the work and assigning it to individuals we worked in a reciprocal fashion with a large group of people. It required a high degree of coordination because we needed ten to 15 separate face-to-face meetings with several people. We relied heavily on the group coordination mode interacting frequently both formally and informally. We had no choice but to treat the experience as tightly coupled.

       Our group system's goal was to complete a role/task RACI. Our representations/artifacts were stored on Box.com in the form of "Activity Sheets" (one activity sheet per process step). They were accessible to anyone given the appropriate permissions. The representations transformed as we revised and updated each activity sheet. Box.com captured the version history

so (if inclined) someone could review the transformation process by reviewing the version history. Ultimately 21 Activity Sheets were completed, so the information was then transferred

to a RACI in an Excel format. I knew we reached our goal when we completed 456 Excel rows of 21 separate activities plus the tasks and subtasks in sequential order along with what role was accountable, responsible, or consulted on the task, or simply needed to be informed of the task's completion. Throughout, the team worked predominately within horizontal channels to complete the RACI and then presented the final version to the project leadership. In hindsight I offer the following recommendations:

1. Ensure there is a high level of clarity and agreement around the process being used to create the deliverable and agree on what the deliverable physically looks (in this case a RACI). Different people had different internally encoded representations of a RACI from past experience. It took us too long to agree on a shared meaning of what our end-state should look like. When we aligned on that and the level of detail required then we were able to reduce the load on the group by (somewhat) simplifying the problem.

2. If there is a clear understanding of what the end goal is and a defined process to get there, then one can allow more independent interdependency in the project, so work can be separated and parsed to drive better and faster results.

#end

4. Knowledge Check In-Residence #2 **Artifact**

While a somewhat odd choice – this knowledge check for our second in-residence is a strong example of my capability to synthesize and apply a large range or information that spans several topics. I also really like this subject matter and after five weeks of collaborative technology, it was refreshing to be back among friends (so to speak). The readings on rhetoric and persuasion helped me quickly recall past classwork (circa 2011) and realize that I'd actually retained and integrated the information into my cluttered mind. Persuasion and rational argumentation are integral to my work and to my success. It helped me remember people use different ploys when trying to make their case and, many times upon further analysis, the arguments are flawed. I'm working to see the flaws in persuasion discourse faster, question them earlier, and improve my response on these conversations.

LO2: Demonstrate the ability to assess complex organizational environments and achieve communication goals.

LO4: Apply communication-centered scholarship in order to strengthen communication effectiveness.

LO5: Critically analyze messages.

D2: Utilize communication to embrace complexity and difference.

D3: Choose to communicate with ethical intention and evaluate the ethical elements of any communication situation.

Key Words: Aristotle, Rhetoric, persuasion, Sophists, Attention Merchants, discourse, genre

Knowledge Check In-Residence #2

1) What are the three views of truth represented by Plato, Gorgias and Aristotle?

   a) Plato represented Absolute Truth, Gorgias believed in no absolute truth > we all can be persuaded to believe something other than what we deem the "truth". And, Aristotle believed in both. He viewed absolute truth as science and rhetoric as the ability to orate on behalf of what was right.

2) What is the social purpose of rhetoric? How does it represent a form of teaching? How is it part of human nature? What ethical rules should apply to persuasive discourse?

   a) From Aristotle's view point, the social purpose of rhetoric was to educate the 'people' on what was right and true, so he believed it was a form of teaching. Plato viewed it as dangerous – something that could be abused. And Gorgias' was, in essence, the persuasive abuser. He was living proof of what Plato warned against.

   b) Again – it depends on whose view point one employs. One school of thought believes that human nature almost demands rhetoric – we're built for it and when used for good, it can educate and guide people to make informed decisions. But, one must believe human nature is ultimately good. If you believe that human nature can be taken advantage, or is weak then rhetoric can be used for more base reasons. Either way – it is part of human nature.

   c) Aristotle's believed persuasive discourse should lead the audience to the right choice; he had faith in the public's ability to arrive at the "true" or just conclusion if presented with a cohesive and factual argument. However, we know that's not usually the case when someone is trying to persuade others. Some of the ethical rules *that should* apply to persuasive discourse include, a true and logical argument, a lack of personal agenda in making the argument, an accurate presentation of both the pros and cons, and the genuine intent to act in the best interest of the audience, or sometimes even the greater good.

3) Who are the Attention Merchants? What does it mean to be a professional persuader? Is there a difference between being a communicator and being a persuader?

   a) An Attention Merchant, to paraphrase Tim Wu, is anyone who attracts human attention for retail (to sell stuff) for profit (to make money for the people selling stuff.) They conjure up something/someone so captivating that it draws an audience who can be sold to advertisers. Wu refers to this as "attention harvesting".

   b) A professional persuader is someone who earns money by persuading others to buy, do, or act in a certain way. Most times the persuader's patron or "sponsor" benefits from the "others" buying, doing, or acting in the prescribed manner. However, the persuader

typically does not influence others unless there is an upside for them: money, reputation enhancement, etc. Of course, as we saw with the early inception of patent medicine – often times persuaders were (are) a one-person band.

c) Is there a difference between a communicator and a 'persuader'? Sometimes. I may communicate, but not with the intention of persuading (e.g., providing directions to someone who asked me for them.) However, to persuade I must communicate in a specific kind of manner. "Communicate" being the operative word.

  i) *Extra Credit*: If communication includes the ability to persuade others, and Sally can persuade others, then she is a communicator.

4) What kind of text is a press release? Is it inherently persuasive or can it be used simply to provide information? What are the characteristics of a "good" press release? Who is the audience for a press release?

  a) A press release, according to Inger Lassen is "A disembedded genre because of its potential as a carrier of a variety of at times conflicting rhetorical objectives" (p. 527). HUH? Here's what I think that means: It is referred to as 'disembedded' because one press release can serve several rhetorical objectives (e.g., review, viewpoint, rebuttal, etc.) I can disembed a part of the press release and embed it somewhere else.

  b) A press release that only provides information? No. There will be some attempt at persuasion.

  c) The typical characteristics of a good press release include an interesting or topical angle, a zippy headline, an abridged (yet compelling) 'story', and the contact information for the releasee.

  d) The audience for a press release can be defined using the stakeholder salience model – anyone who has power, legitimacy, or urgency as it pertains to the organization or entity for whom the release was issued.

5) What ethical duties does a communicator have? What is the role of the communicator in a crisis?

  a) I presume the same ethical duties (rules) apply to a communicator as those *that should* apply to persuasive discourse: a true and logical argument, a lack of personal agenda in making the argument, an accurate presentation of both the pros and cons, and the genuine intent to act in the best interest of the audience, or sometimes even the greater good.

  b) I reviewed Coombs' "Best Practices for Initial Crisis Response" where he discusses some of the following actions: Be quick, (For the love of God) be accurate, be empathetic,

provide assistance to those in need, be consistent, communicate with external and internal stakeholders, and use every means available to communicate to stakeholders (p. N/A).

#end

1.

5. Domino's Case Discussion Response **Artifact**

I developed this response for the Domino's case Michelle's Strategic Communications class. I enjoy case studies in general, but the Domino's case spoke to me because I have worked in and around the retail/service industry my entire career. The event detailed in the case and Patrick Doyle's response were (in my opinion) a text book example of what to do during a reputation and operational crisis. Here again Hirschman's model of the Member Voice is discussed, and the role employee dissent played in the incident. I also used the Stakeholder salience model to understand where each stakeholder group fit into the bigger picture and what type of response was required on Domino's part. This is a solid example of taking several concepts that we learned and applying them to the case analysis.

LO1: Articulate connections between the interdisciplinary field of communications and central themes and managing complexity, collaborative leadership, and elegant communication.

LO5: Critically analyze messages.

LO6: Create and deliver elegant messages appropriate to the audience, purpose, and context.

D2: Utilize communication to embrace complexity and difference.

Domino's Case Discussion Responses

1. What does the company need to say publicly in response to the viral employee video, the huge online following, and the growing media coverage?

- QUICKLY and SINCERELY apologize across several channels, but especially YouTube where the prank surfaced
- Accept accountability – Domino's is a franchise business model, so corporately that could easily claim, "This store is independently owned and operated, so it's really not us…it's the independent business owner's fault."
- What's the plan? Concisely define what steps are being taken to remedy the situation.
- Be Humble – Let's face it. This was a public relations nightmare that could happen to any chain-food restaurant that delivers, however the Domino's customers and anyone who watched, heard, or read about the YouTube prank don't want to hear the 'victim' plot line.
- Lastly, while PAINFUL – Ensure the public(s) know the incident has caused the organization and its leadership pause. What can Domino's do better? What can they change or implement that would provide employees a voice?

In our video lecture Michelle introduced Hirschman's model of the Member Voice. I considered the Domino's 'videographers' could be demonstrating neglect. Perhaps they wanted to be fired? Or, had no other way to demonstrate their frustrations with the organization?

Could this incident, while a BITTER pill to swallow, be an opportunity for the storeowner and Domino's corporate office to reflect and change how they internally communicate with their employees?

2. Then, critique Patrick Doyle's video response. What did he do well and what you recommend that he do differently?

My initial reaction to Doyle's video response was 'WOW"! He hit all the right points in an authentic and concise way. It doesn't get (much) worse than that nauseating video – prank or no prank. At that moment in time all internal and external stakeholders fell into the definitive group. They were all directly impacted, had power, urgency and legitimacy, and demanded communication.

Here's what he did well –

- Offered a heartfelt apology and THANKED the public for bringing the video to Domino's attention

- Alerted them to the immediate actions being taken

- Reinforced how seriously the organization was taking the incident (Dismissed employees and issued felony warrants for their arrest!)

- Reinforced how important the customers trust was to Domino's

- Detailed next steps such as re-examining their hiring practices and dispatching auditors across the country seven days a week to validate the stores' business readiness

- Supported the Store Manager (a local franchisee) and shared that he was "reeling" *[side note: Doyle could have easily thrown the Store Manager under the bus particularly because it was a franchise. That move alone won Doyle the loyalty of his current and prospective franchisees.]*

- Finally – thanked everyone for his or her support as, "We work to regain your trust."

What's fascinating with this case is the juxtaposition of our past weeks' focus compared to this week's. From a crisis management and stakeholder point of view, Dominos and Doyle's response was nearly perfect. But, did they miss an opportunity to investigate what could have prompted the employees' actions? Meaning – did Domino's ever engage in a conversation with the offending employees or other employees to understand what they could do better or differently in terms of two-way communication with the employees? What feedback mediums or venues did Domino's provide for their employees? As I mentioned in my first response – was this an example of (extreme) neglect as defined in Hirschman's model of the Member Voice?

3. In the future, how should the company protect its brand and its reputation? What policies, venues for voice, and training would you recommend?

First, if they don't have one yet then I strongly recommend Domino's draft an internal Social Media policy and ensure field employees participate in its creation and its implantation. But, that's just the beginning.

As we learned in our reading *My Job Sucks* "If members attempt to use official organizational channels and receive an unsatisfactory response, they may decide that these channels do not exist in a meaningful way" (p. 74). In other words, employees may find more expressive ways to air their grievances. Let's suppose for a moment the offending Domino employees tried to raise

concerns to their store and/or regional management, but the concerns fell on deaf ears. They may have gone as far as to use the "800" employee relations phone number to report their issues and then watch as nothing was done about them. The Gossett reading discusses what can happen

when employees feel the organizational communication mechanisms are ineffective (p. 74). Employees may resort to more extremes measures to get the organization's attention.

Secondly, Domino's needs to perform an audit of its current internal communication venues and determine what (if any) are working and what are ineffective – this audit would be best performed by a third party that could objectively analyze the current environment and offer actionable recommendations.

Lastly, Domino's must take a serious look at its current corporate and field management practices to ensure their team have the skills and competencies to lead a geographically dispersed workforce and the technologies to support two-way communication. The Employee Attractiveness Spectrum In our reading *A Great Place to Work* captures the ten best and worst places to work (p. 199). Take a look at the worst – 60% of them (six out of ten) **are retailers** with a geographically dispersed workforce such as Domino's and RadioShack.

#end